

P 201331Z NOV 00  
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8452  
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY  
DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
JCS WASHDC PRIORITY  
NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
USCINCCENT INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/POLAD// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 005396

STATE FOR NEA/ARP  
PARIS FOR O'FRIEL  
LONDON FOR SUTPHIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2010  
TAGS: PREL PGOV MEPP YM  
SUBJECT: SALEH'S RHETORIC OVER THE TOP, BUT POLICY UNCHANGED

REF: STATE 220986

(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BARBARA K. BODINE, REASON 1.5  
(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: IN A MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER BA JAMMAL NOVEMBER 20, THE AMBASSADOR CONVEYED U.S. CONCERNS THAT PRESIDENT SALEH'S RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE EXACERBATING AN ALREADY DIFFICULT SITUATION. AT SUCH A TENSE TIME, THE ROYG SHOULD BE PUBLICLY URGING BOTH SIDES TO RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE, NOT FANNING THE FLAMES OF PAN-ARAB ANGER. THE PRESIDENT'S EXCESSIVE COMMENTS WILL ONLY STRENGTHEN THE POSITION OF REJECTIONISTS ON BOTH SIDES. BA JAMMAL EXPLAINED THAT SALEH'S RHETORICAL EXTRAVAGANCE WAS NECESSARY TO SATISFY PRO-PALESTINIAN YEMENI PUBLIC OPINION AND FILL A VACUUM THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE FILLED BY THE OPPOSITION. HE STRESSED THAT THE ROYG'S SUPPORTIVE POLICY FOR THE MEPP HAD NOT AND WOULD NOT CHANGE. AMBASSADOR CONTINUED THAT THE GAP BETWEEN YEMENI POLICY AND PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC WAS GROWING TOO WIDE TO BE SUSTAINABLE AS SIMPLY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. IT WAS NOT IN THE REGION'S, THE PALESTINIANS' OR YEMEN'S BEST INTEREST THAT THIS CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

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U.S. RESERVATIONS ON RECENT RHETORIC  
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¶2. (C) DURING HER NOVEMBER 20 MEETING WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN MINISTER ABDUL QADIR BA JAMMAL (OTHER TOPICS SEPTEL), AMBASSADOR, PER REFTEL, RAISED GROWING U.S. CONCERNS OVER THE INCREASINGLY SHARP TONE OF PRESIDENT SALEH'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON REGIONAL ISSUES IN GENERAL AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS IN PARTICULAR. THE PRESIDENT'S RECENT COMMENTS ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF JIHAD, HIS ASSERTION THAT ARMED RESISTANCE WAS THE ONLY VIABLE PALESTINIAN OPTION AND HIS PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF REGRET -- REPEATED ON AT LEAST TWO OCCASIONS -- THAT YEMEN DID NOT BORDER ISRAEL AND THEREFORE COULD NOT PROVIDE ARMS FOR THE INTIFADA, WERE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO STOP THE VIOLENCE IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. THEY ALSO APPEARED TO CONTRADICT OFFICIAL ROYG POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR THE MEPP.

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BA JAMMAL: IT'S RHETORIC, NOT SUBSTANCE  
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¶3. (C) BA JAMMAL DOWNPLAYED THE SERIOUSNESS OF SALEH'S REMARKS, ESPECIALLY THOSE EXPRESSING REGRET AT YEMEN'S NOT BEING A BORDERLINE STATE, ADDING THAT HE HAD QUICKLY CLARIFIED THE LATTER IN SUBSEQUENT PRESS INTERVIEWS, DENYING THAT YEMEN WAS CALLING FOR WAR AND RESTATING THAT THE PEACEFUL RECOGNITION OF REGIONAL CONFLICTS REMAINED A FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPT OF YEMENI FOREIGN POLICY. HE EXPLAINED THE PRESIDENT'S RHETORICAL EXTRAVAGANCE AS AN UNAVOIDABLE POLITICAL REALITY: AS AN ARAB LEADER, SALEH IS OBLIGED TO ENTHUSIASTICALLY EMBRACE PAN-ARAB SOLIDARITY DURING PERIODS

OF PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFRONTATION. ALSO, THE YEMENI PUBLIC IS OUTRAGED OVER WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS ISRAEL'S USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS; TO APPEAR SOFT ON ISRAEL WOULD OPEN THE GOVERNMENT TO ATTACKS FROM THE DOMESTIC OPPOSITION.

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THE AMBASSADOR: RHETORIC MATTERS  
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14. (C) THE AMBASSADOR CHARACTERIZED SALEH'S RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS FAR MORE AGGRESSIVE AND INTOLERANT THAN THEY HAD EVER BEEN AND WELL BEYOND THOSE EMANATING FROM MOST OTHER ARAB CAPITALS. IN FACT, BA JAMMAL HAD HIMSELF EARLIER DISPARAGED IRAQ'S CALLING FOR A JIHAD AND A WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST ISRAEL. REGRETTABLY, PRESIDENT SALEH'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO BAGHDAD'S. THIS HAD BEEN NOTICED IN WASHINGTON, WHERE EVEN YEMENI'S FRIENDS WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY WORRIED ABOUT THE EXTREME NATURE OF SOME OF SALEH'S COMMENTS. SUCH STRIDENT RHETORIC ONLY SERVED TO ENCOURAGE VIOLENT REJECTIONISTS ON THE PALESTINIAN SIDE AND CONFIRM HARD-LINE ISRAELI CLAIMS THAT ALL AABS WANT WAR WITH ISRAEL. GIVEN THE VOLATILITY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, OFFICIAL ROYG STATEMENTS SHOULD BE URGING BOTH SIDES TO RETURN TO PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION, NOT EXHORTING MUSLIMS TO JIHAD OR PALESTINIANS TO VIOLENT RESISTANCE.

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ROYG POLICY UNCHANGED: SUPPORT FOR THE MEPP  
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15. (C) BA JAMMAL DEMURRED, CLAIMING THAT OTHER ARAB LEADERS HAD ISSUED SIMILARLY STRONG PUBLIC STATEMENTS. SALEH SHOULDN'T BE SINGLED OUT. POINTING OUT THAT HE HAD SUCCESSFULLY PREVENTED ANTI-MEPP LANGUAGE FROM BEING INCLUDED IN THE OIC SUMMIT'S FINAL COMMUNIQUE, BA JAMMAL INSISTED THAT THE ROYG'S SUPPORTIVE POLICY FOR THE PEACE PROCESS HAD NOT AND WOULD NOT CHANGE. PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION WAS THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE A JUST, LASTING PEACE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS. AT THE SAME TIME THE U.S. MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THE YEMENI LEADERSHIP IS UNDER TREMENDOUS PUBLIC OPINION PRESSURE; THE YEMENI STREET HAS TO BE appeased. SALEH'S RECENT RHETORIC REFLECTS A "COMPETITION" BETWEEN THE ROYG AND THE DOMESTIC OPPOSITION FOR THE PUBLIC'S FAVOR, NOT A POLICY SHIFT.

16. (C) THE AMBASSADOR WARNED BA JAMMAL THAT A CONTINUATION OF SALEH'S RHETORIC RISKED BEING INTERPRETED IN WASHINGTON AS AN INDICATION THAT ROYG POLICY HAS CHANGED OR IS IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGING. BA JAMMAL TOOK THE POINT, BUT DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN ROYG STRATEGY (OVERALL SUPPORT FOR THE MEPP AND PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION) AND TACTICS (BUYING TIME BY appeasing PUBLIC ANGER). THE AMBASSADOR CONCLUDED BY SUGGESTING THAT IT WOULD BE IN EVERYONE'S INTEREST IF THE ROYG BEGAN TO FOCUS ON STRATEGY RATHER THAN TACTICS.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) SALEH'S DESIRE TO BURNISH HIS PAN-ARAB CREDENTIALS AND AVOID OPENING HIMSELF TO ATTACKS FROM THE OPPOSITION IS PREDICTABLE, IF LAMENTABLE. OPPOSITION (AND ESPECIALLY ISLAAH) CRITICISM OF THE ROYG'S DECISION EARLIER THIS YEAR TO REVISE ITS TRAVEL POLICY TO ALLOW YEMENI-ORIGIN ISRAELIS TO RETURN HOME ON LAISSEZ-PASSER WAS PARTICULARLY NASTY. AS A RESULT, THE NEW POLICY HAD TO BE SUSPENDED. SALEH MUST ALSO CAREFULLY MANAGE THE PUBLIC OPINION ASPECTS OF THE U.S. INVESTIGATIVE PRESENCE IN YEMEN FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 12 TERRORIST ATTACK AGAINST THE USS COLE IN ADEN HARBOR. TAKING HARD-LINE STANCES ON REGIONAL ISSUES GIVES SALEH THE POLITICAL COVER HE NEEDS FOR THE CLOSE AND ONGOING YEMENI-U.S. JOINT INVESTIGATION. THAT SAID, HIS RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON IRAQ AND THE MEPP ARE WELL BEYOND THE PALE EVEN IF THEY REFLECT SALEH'S MERCURIAL AND COMBATIVE NATURE RATHER THAN A SHIFT IN ROYG POLICY. AMBASSADOR HAS REQUESTED AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT TO DISCUSS U.S. CONCERNs.

BODINE